

The gentleness that comes, not from the absence of violence, but despite the abundance of it by Nimueh

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Summary:

If only Eddie hadn't dropped the flashlight, maybe he would have gotten to Richie in time to stop him before he did something stupid (something like throwing a rock at a big ass killer clown and calling him a sloppy bitch). But he had dropped it, and Richie is not called trashmouth for nothing.

Or how Eddie deals with knowing Richie could have died from the fall and realising he doesn't want to come back to New York.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

First of all, if you're reading this, THANK YOU. I had this idea going around in my head for the past month and I managed to write 13k already, so I thought I'd upload this first chapter. Hope you enjoy!

Bear with me, English is not my first language pals!
But I'll gladly correct any mistakes you guys point out :3

If only Eddie hadn't dropped the flashlight, maybe he would have gotten to Richie in time to stop him before he did something stupid (something like throwing a rock at a big ass killer clown and calling him a *sloppy bitch*). But he had dropped it, and Richie is not called trashmouth for nothing so that's why now Eddie is blankly staring at his levitating figure. He can only see his back, but Pennywise's got him and Eddie freezes. It's brief but he's in shock and can't move for about five seconds-- that's when he remembers he can't chicken out again, he can't let this paralysing fear take over him again because this time Richie could actually die. Richie's body is fucking floating seven feet off the ground *for fuck's sake*, and he knows what happens when you stay there-- in the deadlights. He saw the consequences 27 years ago, all those kids suspended in the air until Pennywise decided it was enough and dropped them down, dead.

That thought is enough for Eddie to get his shit together. He feels the coldness of the spear under his hand, the one Bev gave him before, and repeats the mantra she told him.

This kills monsters, if you believe it does.

His fist tightens around the spear.

If you believe it does.

He shuts his eyes, focuses on the weapon, on believing--

If you believe it does-- then opens them, looks up at Pennywise and his whole expression changes-- eyes darken, lips pressed, he has never looked so determined.

If you believe it does.

Eddie dashes forward, rage invading him, spreading out inside him, reaching the tips of his fingers, toes, ears-- it feels like fuel filling up his veins. He feels unstoppable.

“Beep, beep, motherfucker!”

The spike flies straight into Pennywise’s head, landing right in its mouth and piercing through, it makes Pennywise stumble backwards until it loses its balance and falls back, getting impaled on the spikes that arise from the ground. Immediately, Richie’s body drops to the ground with a loud thud.

“Holy shit” Eddie lets out, and Mike smiles as he sees Pennywise slowly turning back to its original form. It’s getting smaller, weaker, they can beat it now.

Bill is quick on his feet, running towards Pennywise to finish him off and Mike follows closely behind. Eddie doesn’t go after them, instead he turns and rushes back to Richie, who is flatly lying on the ground.

“Rich” he calls, he has so much adrenaline running through his veins it’s hard to contain it “*Rich*”

He’s almost on top of him, shaking him just enough so he will react “Rich, wake up”

Nothing.

Adrenaline starts to wash off, and Eddie’s tone softens when he speaks again “Come on, *buddy*, wake up”

Still nothing.

A shiver runs through Eddie’s spine as he realises that Richie’s eyes are still completely white, his face is pale as a sheet. He’s still in *there*.

From the corner of his eye, Eddie sees Bev and Ben emerging from one of the caves within the cistern, and glances at them. Bev looks soaking wet, only she's not covered in water but something darker and stickier, something like... *blood*? By her side is Ben, who just looks covered in sand and dust and overall dirt. They both seem to spot Bill and Mike pretty quickly and run towards them.

They don't really know what they're doing, so they're trying the only thing that worked all those years ago-- they make it small, they try bullying it into non-existence.

Even from afar, Eddie knows they're calling for him. He can hear them, their voices are mildly muted but still clear.

"Eddie!"

Yeah, that's Mike

"Eh- Eh- Ed- Eddie, b-buddy, wuh- w- we need y- you here!"

And that's Bill; his stuttering has gotten worse, always does under stressful circumstances (a killer clown probably counts as a big one).

The point is he can hear them both but can't bring himself to leave Richie alone. So he stays there, unmoving, not really doing anything other than look at Richie and trying to think, *think, think*, until Bill comes for him, grabs him by the arm and pulls.

Bill is strong, he's not big like Ben, but he's determined. Eddie resists him, shaking his head no in the process, almost looking like a child being dragged away from playground and making a fuss about it.

"Eddie, wuh-w-we h-h-have to b-be tuh-tuh-together for th-this tuh-tuh-to work" He's blinking so hard trying to get the words out that Eddie feels deeply sympathetic for him, "Tuh-tuh-to k-k-kill hi-him"

Eddie glances back at Richie, "Richie's still in there"

That's when it dawns on Bill, what Eddie means.

"What's gonna happen if we kill *it* while he's still in there, Bill?"

The way he's asking-- he's just a little kid again, searching Bill's eyes for reassurance, waiting for Bill to tell him that everything's going to be okay, that Big Bill has it all under control. When he doesn't, Eddie feels like crying.

"I duh-duh-don't know"

He hasn't felt this scared before in his life. Not knowing is terrifying, Eddie *hates* not knowing. He tries to breathe but his throat closes as he inhales, he instinctively reaches for his aspirator, only to remember he doesn't have it on him anymore. Richie took it away from him and then said *you're braver than you think*.

He's not. He's really not.

"Th-th-this is our only ch-ch-ch-chance, Ed-Eddie"

When his breathing becomes more erratic he tries to focus. He can't deal with fake asthma now, he just can't. *You don't need that shit*. It's Richie's voice, but it's also his own.

"P-pl-please?"

So he calms himself down and nods, taking a last glance at Richie before going after Bill.

They kill the fucking clown.

As the remains of whatever this creature was vanish, slowly disintegrating-- face and limbs and torso fading as an old piece of paper does when it comes in contact with fresh skin--, a thought storms into Eddie's mind and brings him back to reality.

Richie.

Just with that, the magic is broken. The momentary feeling of victory, relief, accomplished vengeance... is gone. All that is left is the anxiousness of turning back and not knowing what he's going to find behind.

If I stay here, right here, I don't have to know-- If I stay here, nothing happens.

And let's be honest, uneasiness lives in Eddie, always has. It made his way into him when he was just a kid-- his mother shoving apprehension down his throat until it filled him, until it became him. Living in constant fear is what he's used to do, but now-- *now* there's something... something that he can't quite place that slaps him in the face and tells him *No, fucking no, Eddie, get your shit together*, and that's his voice, his thirteen year old self voice. Young Eddie was so much braver than he is now, young Eddie stood his ground when he found out about the sugar pills; adult Eddie has only cowardly acted up, never daring to face the new version of his mom, not in a way that mattered anyway. But he doesn't have time to think about that now, he needs to get to Richie, so he sprints back to where his body lies, falls down on his knees and leans forward.

"Richie" he says, and again "Rich"

He must sound like a broken record, saying his name over and over again, but he doesn't know what else to do. Richie's face is just as colourless as before, same as his eyes.

"Richard Tozier wake the fuck up" he says as he pats his cheek, desperately.

Bev and Bill have just appeared by his side, Ben and Mike are standing right behind him. Richie is not moving at all, there is no sign he's breathing, there's no sign he's alive, no nothing. Eddie turns to Bill looking for something-- anything, but catches him eyeing Bev and the look he's giving her is nothing but disheartening. Eddie feels his heart sink, the world collapsing around him (aside from the fact that everything around him is literally starting to collapse). If this place wasn't already falling apart, he would tear it down himself.

He turns to Richie again, not willing to give up on him, and thinks about Stan. Patty didn't give up on him either.

"Come on, man--" he begs, his voice starts to falter "It's me, *Eds*."

If Richie was awake he would be making fun of how pleading Eddie

sounds. He would definitely say something about the Eds thing too, something along the lines of *Hey, Eds, my man! Edddds. So glad you came around with that. It has such a nice ring to it, don't you think, Eds? It's just... cute, like you. Eeeeeddds.* He would roll the name on his tongue, just enough so it'd become annoying. *God, I hate you so much.*

This type of shortness of breath is not one his inhaler can fix.

Bev is crying behind him, and he can't do anything but shake his head no, over and over again. He refuses to look at her, because he thinks that if he does it will all become too real.

"We need to get him outta here" he says, almost robotically.

Bill sniffs, *so he's crying too, that's just great.*

"E-E-Eddie, I d-d-don't think, h-h-h-he-"

Eddie snaps his head up at Bill, not holding back.

"I DON'T FUCKING CARE WHAT YOU THINK, BILL! I'M NOT LEAVING WITHOUT HIM"

Bill swallows hard and eyes Mike. Eddie knows they will drag him out if they have to, he'd like to see them try. He turns his attention back to Richie, and there is only one thing for him left to do, and it's awfully definite. Eddie's fingers travel up Richie's chest and end up pressing against his neck, looking for a pulse. If he can't find any... that's it. He's gone.

Eddie shuts his eyes, focuses on the skin; finds it warm under his touch, and--

"He's alive!" his whole face brightens, turning to look back up at Bev.

"What?!" she says, and her eyes widen in surprise, conveying nothing but hopefulness.

"There's-- There's a pulse, he's alive! He's alive, Bev. He's alive guys!" Eddie speaks fast, tripping over the words, like he did when he was a kid "Come on, we gotta-- we gotta get him outta here"

Bev nods, wiping the tears with the back of her hand, and Ben is already by Richie's side, lifting him up and throwing one of Richie's arms around his shoulders. Eddie wraps his arm around Richie's waist and takes the rest of the weight. Richie is still out, and there's honestly no guarantee that he will be fine, but for the moment the only thing Eddie focuses on is that he is here, he is alive, and they're getting him out of this shithole.

There had been many times during the last 27 years of Eddie's life in which he had felt something was off. It had happened sometimes when he was on his way back home from work, and he'd spotted a couple of kids riding their bikes and calling names at each other. It had happened sometimes when he had walked down one of New York's busiest streets and he had felt anxious, trapped, like there was so much noise he couldn't take it, like he wasn't supposed to be there, like he didn't belong. It had also happened (many times), when he slipped into bed at night and looked at his left, expecting to find something other than the shape of Myra under the sheets. It had even happened once when he was at a restaurant with some of his associates, and he had ordered some rigatoni but the waiter had brought him spaghetti instead. He couldn't place the feeling, but it had been there, for as long as he could remember. Some sort of void, a quiet emptiness.

But then... It had *not* happened when Mike called. It had not happened when he entered the town of Derry. It had not happened when he walked into the Jade of the Orient. It had all fallen into place when Richie stroke the gong. Suddenly, there it was-- the missing piece, the losers.

Dinner had not been fun, - with all the fortune cookies shit and finding out about Stan's attempted suicide - but it had felt right. Before things started to go apeshit, Eddie had been having *fun*. They had been talking, remembering, *drinking*. Eddie hadn't drunk in years. Myra hated it when he did, she said it made him look stupid, bad-mouthed and inappropriate. Every time he had, on the rare occasion they had gone out with colleagues, Myra had made sure to remind him how embarrassed she'd felt by his behaviour and had added *it's terrible for your health, Eddie Bear*.

That night at the restaurant, he drank. It was all entirely too much--coming back home, *Richie*, reuniting with the losers, *Richie*, remembering a childhood he had forgotten, *Richie*, finally understanding what was missing, *Richie*. *Richie, Richie, Richie*. He ordered wine to shake him off of his head, then move on to beer when wine didn't do the trick. Shots came after Richie wouldn't stop looking at him and nagging him and-- and-- making him feel so fucking good. Fortune cookies saved him from himself, and from saying more stupid fucking shit like *let's take our shirts off and kiss*.

That night he realised something, something altogether dangerous and suffocating and that made him reach for his inhaler for the first time in months. A thirteen year old Eddie having a gay panic came to mind, pacing the clubhouse after everyone had left, briefly glancing at the hammock where Richie and he had been reading comics that afternoon.

It had not been easy then, and it wasn't easy now. He was married now, he had this whole life in New York, just as he had planned out. Or had his mom planned it out for him? It doesn't matter now, there are more important things to think about, especially as they carry Richie out of Neibolt, feet dragging along the ground because he's a big guy and basically dead weight. Ben and Eddie manage to sit him down once they've passed the rusty fence and reach the road. Eddie sits next to him and helps him lie down, placing his head on his lap, fingers softly moving away a lock of hair from his forehead.

"Bill" Eddie calls, looking back up at him "Ambulance?"

Bill nods, bringing out his phone, taps on it repeatedly and scrunches up his face at it "It's d-d-dead, I can't--"

Mike cuts in, phone already in hand "Mine is working"

As Mike is dialing, Richie makes the smallest noise, a barely audible groan accompanied by the mildest twitch and makes Eddie jerk up, looking down at him. Richie flutters his eyelashes open, squints his eyes as brightness overwhelms him and his pupils dilate when he tries to focus. Above him there's only Eddie's face, the rising sun creating the illusion of a heavenly halo around his head. If there's a god, he's definitely having some chucks at Richie's expense.

“Richie, hey, Richie” Eddie rushes; his hand is cupping Richie’s cheek before he realises. And only then he notices the cracked lens in Richie’s glasses.

Richie clears his throat.

“Sorry-” his voice sounds rough, like he had just recovered from a sore throat “I don’t-- I don’t--” and furrows his brow “--Who are *you*?”

And Eddie’s heart leaps, his face turning grave in a matter of seconds.

“What? Wh-What are you talking about? It’s Eddie” he says, and frowns “Don’t you remember?” and he looks at the others, encouraging Richie to follow his gaze “These are Bev, Bill, Mike and Ben, *dude*” but when Eddie looks back at Richie he finds him grinning.

“You’re a fucking asshole” and there’s actually some rage in those words. He tilts his head back and exhales with relief, then looks down again “Do you think this is fucking funny? I really fucking hate you right now”

“Awww Eds, you looked so worried”

“Of course I was worried, dickwad” Richie keeps on smiling, so Eddie ignores him “Can you move? Does something hurt?”

“Nah, I’m fine” he says, non-chaantly, “And I think I can move, yeah”

“Okay, great, that’s good” Eddie says, momentarily relieved “Mike? Bring the car around, he needs to go to a hospital if no one is fucking calling an ambulance”

Mike lets out a “hey, man” of complaint but he is already pulling out the keys when Richie’s pout turns serious and says “No, no hospital”

Eddie snaps his head and looks at him, his face is the embodiment of *are you out of your fucking mind?*

“I’m fine” he dismisses, averting his gaze and fully knowing that’s not going to be enough to convince Eddie “I’m perfectly fine”

“Fine?” Eddie says, clearly shocked by how stupid this whole thing is “You’re fine?!” then looks at the rest of the group, in disbelief “He says he’s fine!”

Out of Eddie’s line of sight, Richie rolls his eyes.

“You’re not fucking fine, Richie!” he’s looking upwards now, to the sky above them, as if searching for the strength he needs to fight such a stupid, *stupid* thing “An alien clown hypnotized you, made you fucking float seven feet off the ground, and then let you fall and hit the fucking ground from that height. You’ve been unconscious for--” he checks his watch and his eyes widen “more than 40 fucking minutes, of course you need a hospital, dipshit! You could-- You could-- You could have brain damage, nerve damage, internal hemorrhages, a concussion--”

Eddie keeps on rambling, which usually Richie finds to be really adorable but right now, this piercing headache is asking for silence, so he shushes him, which accomplishes nothing because Eddie doesn’t ever stop talking “--and you can bet those scratches are going to get infected with all that greywater and dirt and--”

“Oh my god, Eddie, shut up! Shut up, please” and then gives in “Okay, you win, we’ll go to the hospital” he says “You annoyed me into going to the hospital, are you happy now?”

“Yes, very happy, thank you”, then tries to move from under him but Richie’s grip in his arm stops him.

“Can I--” he attempts, and then rephrases “I just-- just need to rest for a bit. Can we like not move? Just for five minutes, just--”

“I don’t think that’s a g--”

His own words are cut off when Eddie makes the mistake of looking down at Richie, who looks so very vulnerable and soft and altogether tired that he has no other choice than to oblige. He slowly nods and his voice is barely audible when he says “Okay, but Mike is going to get the car now”

Richie sighs but nods in agreement.

“Mike?”

“On it!” Mike calls back, already walking away.

Eddie doesn't dare to look up at the others when Richie accommodates himself against his chest, almost like a cat. He breathes in and tries to cover that he's blushing by hiding behind the bandage on his cheek and looking the other way. Every bit of him feels hot right now, cheeks, ears, even his hands; and especially that spot in his chest where Richie's head is resting, breathing all to peacefully, and that other spot around Eddie's side where Richie's hand is holding onto. This is a proximity he hasn't experienced with anyone in years.

Ben plops down on the ground, and lays down, spread out like a starfish.

“I need to sleep for 10 hours straight” he says.

Bev drags herself to Ben and curls up next to him, head resting on his chest. Ben's right arm then surrounds her and brings her closer. Ben is covered in dirt, but she's sticky with blood, and the mixture of both of those things is probably the most disgusting thing they have and will ever experience, but they're tired, unbelievably tired and therefore do not care.

“O-Okay guys” Bill says, stutter already improving “Th-this is all very cuh-cuh-cute, but we're actually tuh-taking up th-the road”

Bev looks up at him and smiles. “I don't think anyone uses this road, Bill”

So they wait there until Mike comes back with the car.

“I want to go home” Richie in the emergency room.

There are not many people there aside from them, but they are all staring at the group of friends that entered the room looking like Dante after going through all nine circles of hell.

Bev shushes him, but it's no use because when has that ever worked with Richie?

"I don't like hospitals--" he whines again

"You agreed to this" Eddie says.

"And besides, I'm perfectly fine"

"I don't fucking care that you think you're *fine*, Richie" he bites back in a harsh whisper. "They're gonna run as many tests as they need to and you'll behave like an adult"

"But it's gonna be so much moneeeey"

He's pouting, a 6'2" forty year old man pouting in the emergency room of Derry's local hospital. Eddie is so worried and frustrated and angry that he almost doesn't find it adorable. Almost.

"I will fucking pay for it, asshole"

Richie scrunches up his nose and replies "I don't want you to pay for it, I have money"

"Monopoly mon--"

Bev leans over and smiles at them, saying through gritted teeth "Could you guys, maybe... shut the fuck up?"

Richie sighs, leaning back in his seat and stretching out his stupid long legs. Eddie looks away and focuses on the posters hanging on the wall in front of him, then stares at the floor when he's gone over all of them.

When the doctor finally calls for Richie, Eddie goes with him. Of course he does. He doesn't trust Richie to remember everything they'll say to him, so he must go with him and make sure everything's taken care of. It has nothing to do with the fact that he's terrified of leaving Richie alone.

Eddie needs to sit. He needs to find the nearest chair and sit the fuck down. He's weak at the knees, his head spinning from all the horrible things the doctor is saying could have happened. *Fractured skull*. Not that he didn't know, it's just that someone actually confirming them it's just too much. *Irreversible spine and nerve damage*. He's only getting pieces of information because he can't for the life of him quiet down the pounding in his head. *Punctured lungs*. *Coma*. The pencil from the doctor's desk is now in Eddie's hands. He's fidgeting with it to cover the fact that they're shaking when the doctor says the worst of them all. *Death*. He could have died, right there and then. He could have died and Eddie wouldn't have been able to do anything about it.

He shouldn't have asked, he shouldn't have insisted. The doctor had been reluctant at first, about telling Eddie what the consequences of that fall could have been, that's never a good sign. But he insisted because that's what his mother used to do (it's what Myra does too), and old habits die hard. So yeah, he's freaking out, even though the doctor keeps saying that everything seems to be alright, that he shouldn't worry. *Ha, joke's on you, I live in a constant state of fear*.

He is keeping together for Richie. If he wasn't looking at him from the stretcher where he's sitting down, Eddie would be probably freaking out. First Stan, now Richie. Eddie is sure someone or something is determined to give him a heart attack this week.

Eddie feels Richie's eyes on him but doesn't look up at him, afraid that if he does his anxiety will spiral out of control. He doesn't want to put that on Richie, it's the last thing he needs right now.

They had already run some tests, even though it was pretty clear he hadn't broken any bones nor had he any open wounds that needed immediate attention, but when they got there Richie's back was hurting, as well as his right knee, and they wanted to make sure everything was okay.

So now, after tending to his flesh wounds, they will keep him in the observation unit for twenty four hours before releasing him in the morning if everything is okay. The doctor said it could still be possible for Richie to have some internal hemorrhages that hadn't shown in the tests, so it was best they kept an eye on him. Eddie agreed, and insisted on keeping him there as long as it was necessary.

Money is not an issue he had said just-- *please make sure everything is alright.*

“It’s a miracle” the doctor says eventually, catching Eddie's attention
“I don’t know how you managed to come out unharmed, Mr. Tozier”

“Haven’t you heard, Doc? I’m invincible” he grins when he says it, a clear attempt to lighten the mood. In response, Eddie smiles bitterly as he runs a hand through his hair.

“We’re taking you to the observation unit now” the doctor says. and Richie feels the impulse to groan or complain or manifest in some way that he really doesn’t like hospitals, and that he doesn’t want to stay in one for a minute longer. For some reason, he doesn’t.

The doctor turns his attention back to Eddie and says “I’m sorry, but you can’t come with him, Mr. Kaspbrak. EOU visiting hours are from 5 to 7 pm, you’ll be able to visit him within those times”

Even though he wants to say *fuck the fucking rules, I’m coming with him* he knows that's not going to work. Besides, he’s not in the best headspace, he would just project all his anxiety onto Richie and make things worse. So he simply nods in understanding.

Richie gets off the stretcher and follows the doctor. On his way out, he stops by Eddie’s side and lays a hand on his shoulder.

“See ya later, alligator”, then winks at him and pats him on the shoulder before leaving the room.

Eddie has an asthma attack. Or is it a panic attack? He guesses it’s the latter, since he hasn’t ever been diagnosed with asthma. But that’s not what matters now, what matters is that he’s hidden away in the toilets because he knew this was bound to happen sooner or later. He managed to hold it back long enough to inform the rest of the losers about what the doctor had said, and then politely excused himself to the washroom, where he is now, crouched on the floor inside one of the stalls. His legs are pressed against his chest, his arms are crossed over them and his head buried in them. Not only is he heaving like

he hasn't before, but there are also tears uncontrollably running down his cheeks that end up collected in his jacket sleeves along with his snot. He sniffs and tries to breathe in, but his throat is not having any of it. Eddie thinks that if he doesn't suffocate to death today, he will never do.

When the door to the washroom opens, Eddie tries to keep the sobbing down to a minimum but it's virtually impossible.

"Eddie?" it sounds like Bill, and Eddie bites down on his knuckles in a useless attempt to stop crying.

"Are yuh-yuh-you here, buh-buddy?"

Eddie knows he is asking out of politeness, because there's no way he's not hearing his ugly sobbing. There's no response in Eddie's side, and suddenly there's the sound of running water. Just a few seconds later, Bill turns the tap off, walks to the stall where Eddie is hiding, and sits besides it with his back to the wall, criss-crossing his legs.

"Th-thought you mah-mah-might wuh-want this"

The stall's door has two openings, one above and one below, and he uses the one below to hand Eddie his inhaler. It has been cleaned--it's still wet. There are some grey water stains that wouldn't come out but Eddie appreciates the gesture. It's the one Richie took away from him. He didn't know he'd kept it, he didn't know when he'd given it to Bill.

Eddie takes it from Bill's hand without hesitation, then lifts his head up until he's sitting straight. He shakes it hard, puts it in his mouth and presses down on it. He feels instant relief as the medicine is released, then shuts his eyes and tries to even out his breathing, but it's not enough, so after a couple of minutes, he takes a second puff.

"Buh-buh-better?"

Eddie nods in response, then realises he can't see him, and clears his throat before letting out a strangled "Think so"

"I'm he-he-here, Eh-Eddie" he says "I'll s-st-stay here until yuh-yuh-you're ready to cuh-come out" He knows Eddie so well, after all these

years apart. He knows how to make him feel he's close while keeping his distance, it's probably his greatest virtue.

Eddie looks down at the floor, where Bill's kept his hand on his side of the stall, inviting. He glances at it, calculating for a second before deciding to place his hand on top. In response, Bill turns his hand around and squeezes Eddie's.

2. Chapter 2

The room is dark when Richie wakes up. The sun hadn't started setting when they came back from the hospital, so he must've been out for a couple of hours at least. His eyes adjust quickly to the darkness; there's only some light coming in through the blinds so Richie switches on the bedside lamp and shuts his eyes instinctively as the brightness results in a sharp pain behind his eyes. He spots a glass of water on the nightstand, and sits up with a biting pain in his back that makes him wince. His left hand reaches for the glass of water and he chugs it down almost in one go. His phone screen lights up when he sets the glass back on the nightstand; it's a message from Bev.

Is Sleeping Beauty up yet?

Richie smiles and texts back.

she is and she needs some drugzzzz

Shortly after Richie hears footsteps coming up the staircase, followed by a knock on the door.

"Come in!" he says, loud enough to be heard, but not to make his headache worse "I'm decent"

"You're never decent" Bev says as she goes through the door.

Richie mouths an "ouch" but smiles at her as she approaches the bed. She sits right next to him, setting a new glass of water and a white pill on the bedside table. The doctor had prescribed him some opioids for when the pain was too much. He had warned him about the side effects because he'd probably experience some of them, given that he had not been near this type of drugs in years. Richie was hoping for them to get him a little bit high, but he would settle for them simply taking away the pain.

"How are you feeling?"

Bev looks perfect, her hair truly is winter fire under the dim light

"Can't you see? I'm alive and kicking, darling" he says, and takes the pill with a large sip of water "How long was I out?"

Bev checks her watch and casually says, "Almost a day"

Richie's eyes widen in response and his eyebrows go up all the way to his hairline. "Exsqueeze me?"

Bev smiles slyly, "Nah, just kidding. Five hours"

"That's bullying. What you're doing to me right now, that's bullying" but he's smiling back at her.

"Oh come on, you big baby" she gestures with her hand in a dismissive way, "Are you hungry?"

"Ravenous"

"You feel like coming down and eating with the rest of us or you want me to bring you something?"

"I think I'll come down"

"Good" she says "Because we can't deal with sleep deprived Eddie for a minute longer-"

Richie's stomach twists at that. Bev had told him Eddie had refused to come back to the Town House while he was being monitored in the EOU. Richie had seen him at 5pm, when they let him in for visitations, and he had already look tired then, Richie can only imagine how he looks now, after spending the night in the waiting room.

"I think he'll relax-" *Relax, Eddie, yeah, that's funny* "-and finally allow himself to go to sleep once he's seen you're full on Richie again. He doesn't think doctors should've released you so early and he's freaking out."

"So you're saying Eddie is questioning medical wisdom?" he says, honestly surprised, and puts on a silly Voice of his "Yowzaa, that is shocking!"

His smile falters when he takes on Bev's face.

"He's worried, Rich" she says "We all are. You could have died"

Richie sighs, he doesn't like real conversations, they're just *too real*. Everything is easier when you joke about it. He really wants to say something goofy, make one of his voices, put on silly face-- but Bev is looking at him as if she's going to murder him if he does.

"I know comedy is your way of deflecting how you really feel and that's okay, but-- Well, it's not okay but I get it--", she reaches for Richie's hand, takes it and strokes his thumb against it. It's odd, feeling someone's warmth against his own. It's such a small gesture, and he used to be so touchy, but it makes him feel too aware of himself now.

"Just let us worry, okay?"

"Okay" Richie nods and purses his lips "I guess I can do that"

"And don't tease Eddie," she warns with a pointing finger "he's a ticking time-bomb"

With a grin, he says, "That, my love, I can't promise"

Bev pats him on the leg, biting back a smile. She looks like she's thinking *I can't figure the two of you out*.

"Now move your royal ass and come have dinner with us"

When Richie comes down the stairs with Bev, everyone turns to look at them. His head is still pounding and the brightness of the room is not helping, but getting out of the closed smelly space that was his bedroom was refreshing.

"Wow man" Mike says, putting on a wide smile "You look like shit"

Richie grins slightly, only then realising he hadn't even bothered to take a shower after coming back from the hospital. He hadn't showered there either, they had just cleaned his flesh wounds and

bandaged them before letting him go. Ben and Bev brought him some spare clothes, so he did change what he was wearing but when he eventually came into his room at the Town House, he had just let himself fall down on the bed and drift off, probably drooling all over the pillow. Eddie's voice resonates in his head, lecturing him about how hazardous to health that decision was. *You slept like that?! Are you intentionally looking to get an infection, asshole? Your hair is fucking disgusting, you smell like a fucking trash can and you're covered in flesh wounds, dipshit. How have you survived for forty-one years remains a mystery to me!*

"Feeling better?" Ben asks, meeting them at the bottom of the stairs. He looks nothing like he did yesterday - he's clean shaven, not a speck of dirt on him and he smells like cinnamon. *Interesting contrast* Richie thinks.

"Just peachy"

He spots Eddie staring at him from across the room, he looks exhausted and uneasy, just as he was when he last saw him. When Richie had looked down at the hall before walking down the stairs, he'd seen him pacing the space; he had only stopped after hearing steps. Now, he stands completely still (very much like in the restaurant) except for the finger tapping on his thigh. To his right, and more collected than Eddie, is Bill. Seeing them together brings back some memories from when they were kids. *They were always together, weren't they?* he thinks. They were the best of friends; they were more than friends, they were *family*. It was almost as if, after Georgie's death, Bill had taken Eddie under his wing, adopted him as his little brother and sworn to protect him from all evil. Now, after all these years, even after forgetting one another, it's no different.

"So," Richie says, as he rubs his hands together "what's for dinner? Me hungwwwy"

Bill shakes his head and grins "Wuh-we ordered p-p-pizza"

"Awww," Richie pouts "no chinese?"

"Yeah, no-- we figured no one would be in the mood for chinese" Mike says.

“Ground control to Maaaaajor Eds”

Bowie is not one of Richie’s good voices. Come to think of it, there are not many voices he is good at. He keeps trying though, and, in a way, Eddie finds that endearing.

“Huh?” Eddie says, and looks at him through heavy-lidded eyes.

“Oh dear, you look absolutely knackered!” Richie pulls another one of his voices, trying to get a smile out of him.

He’s right, Eddie is absolutely worn out. His blinking had become slower and thicker with each passing minute.

“Don’t--- don’t do the british old lady” Eddie says, and lowers his head to hold back a grin, but he’s too tired to prevent the corners of his mouth from giving him away. Richie takes that as a success. “It sucks”

Richie’s face lights up, “You remember?”

Eddie deadpans, but deep down he really loves how easy talking to Richie is “Your voices are so incredibly bad and annoying that is literally impossible to forget them”

He wasn't completely lying. Over the last three decades, Eddie had had moments in which *someone* would speak inside his head, they'd say some catchy line that sounded absolutely out of character for Eddie, and he wouldn't recognise the voice that spoke such things. He'd convince himself they were TV characters, Myra did watch a lot of TV after all.

Turns out they weren't. Turns out an alien being with supernatural powers is not enough to make him completely forget Richie Tozier.

Richie responds with a toothy smile. His front teeth are slightly bigger than they should and it makes him look absurdly goofy; people used to make fun of this same smile back then. Eddie had always liked it.

“Naaaah, you love them,” Richie stretches an arm and puts it around Eddie's shoulders; the contact makes him tense up for a second, he hadn't realized how much he missed Richie touching him just because. But he's not completely distracted by it, and still manages to roll his eyes when Richie adds, “you love everything about me, Spaghetti man”

Insufferable dork.

“But my point still stands, you should rest, man”

“I'm okay” he says right before a yawn escapes his mouth. Richie takes the opportunity and pokes his good cheek. When Eddie closes his mouth and opens his eyes, Richie still has that stupid grin on.

It scares him, seeing Richie being so *Richie*. It feels too good to be true. That he came out unharmed from that fall, that every test they ran turned out okay, that he is fine, and here, and keeping Eddie close. He feels like something is going to happen, something that'll shatter the illusion, and it fucking scares him to the core.

“How you feeling? Okay?” Eddie asks.

Richie chuckles, and pulls him closer, as if he was to confide a secret “I think I'm kinda high”

Richie's breath brushes his cheek when he speaks.

They are so close.

So close.

If he were to turn his head, they noses would bump. Instead, Eddie side eyes him, curving his lips into a playful smile.

“Oh, you think?”

Richie nods enthusiastically, his curls tickling Eddie's earlobe. It's the restaurant all over again; only this is worse. Richie on opioids has no boundaries, Richie on opioids is his thirteen year old self, all touchy and over the place, and he just likes it *too much*. *What is this? What are you playing at, Eddie?*

“Yep, really enjoying the drugs”

“Of course you are, asshole”

But he really wants to know if Richie is okay, if his back still hurts so badly, if he's got a headache, if his knee has given him a rest-- he wants to know everything. There's this thing though, this little voice inside his head (and this is not one of Richie's voices) that keeps telling him *don't sound too worried, don't sound like her, don't be like her.*

“But I meant... how are you feeling in terms of pain and-- y'know”

Good job, Kaspbrak.

“Full of beans! Fresh as a daisy!”

From across the table, Bev cocks an eyebrow at him, probably wondering how does he know so many expressions for the same thing.

“No, but really, I feel great. My back doesn't hurt at all since I took what the doctor prescribed”

“That's--” and nods along the words “Yeah, that's good”

“Yep” and with a ‘boop’ to Eddie's nose, “Don't worry Kaspbrak, I'll be giving it to your mom in the blink of an eye”

Eddie frowns in disgust “She's been dead for fifteen years, idiot”

But Richie simply shrugs “I'm not picky”

After a while, and once they've all finished eating, Richie turns his attention to Mike and the conversation he and Bill are having.

“So...any news on Stan?” interrupts whatever they're saying.

Mike shifts in his seat, looking away from Bill and fixating his gaze on Bev, who says “I talked to Patty earlier, he's still recovering”

“W-we tuh-talked about v-v-visiting him” Bill adds “Neh-neh-next

week”

“He’ll be at home by then” Mike adds.

“You think he’ll remember us?” Richie asks after a moment, and the room falls silent.

After Mike called, memories started to resurface, small pieces of information that weren’t good enough to understand the bigger picture. There were so many missing pieces in the puzzle that they weren’t able to fully understand what was going on; they had forgotten each other, they had forgotten everything about their time in Derry. Even now they still had blanks to fill in, memories suddenly coming back and awakening parts of them that had been asleep for three decades. The Jade of the Orient had only been the beginning of that journey, and they knew for a fact, Stan was lagging behind them.

“I think he will” Ben says finally “When we get there. If we are all there together, he’ll remember”

Eddie then cuts in with a question that none of them wants to think of “Will he want to?”

“Huh?” Ben responds, puzzled.

“Will he want to remember?” he says again “If the sole thought of coming back, even without knowing what happened, made him--” Eddie doesn’t dare to say it, so he shakes his head slightly and asks instead “What makes you think he’ll want to remember all of it?”

Ben opens his mouth to answer, but shuts it almost immediately. No one says anything. They hadn’t really considered that, but now that Eddie has brought it up, it seems quite logical. None of them says anything after that, they remain lost in thought for God knows how long, until Richie breaks the silence.

Standing up, and holding on to the back of the chair, he says “Ooookay” he looks light-headed, and uncomfortable. “I’m gonna take a shower”

“Good call, Rich” Mike nods from across the table, raising his beer at him “You reek, man”

“Gimme a break, Mikey. I just survived a psycho clown”

He’s joking, and he sounds like he is, but still, from the corner of his eye, he can see Eddie shift uncomfortably in his seat; like he doesn’t want to be reminded of what happened. But it happened, and cracking jokes about it it’s the only coping mechanism Richie knows.

He takes a last gulp of his water and then reaches for his plate, but Ben’s hand stops him midway.

“I’ll take care of that”

Richie smiles and waggles his eyebrows at him “Uhhh, interesting. And what exactly does *that* entitle?”

Ben sighs but grins all the same, he should have known better.

“Go and take a fucking shower, Rich” Bev orders.

His wounds sting a little when they come into contact with the hot water coming out of the showerhead. It becomes more bearable after a couple of minutes, allowing Richie to relax and let the water wash off all the shitty things that happened down there along with the dirt, and the smell. Under the running water, the side effects of the drugs start to wear off. He lathers his hair up not once but twice, and does the same with the rest of his body. He feels a pointed sting everytime he goes over a bruise, and he's covered in them, so he tries to do it quickly.

He reaches for the towel that is closer and inspects it; it looks clean enough. He dries himself sloppily and barely dries his hair. He then wraps the towel around his hips and steps out of the bathroom as he puts his glasses back on. Cracked glass, he needs to get that fixed. The sight of Eddie in his room, going around the bed while so reading out clean sheets, startles him.

Without looking up, Eddie says “I can not believe you slept like that. I knew you had, I fucking knew it. The moment you came down the stairs with the same clothes Bev brought you to the hospital I just knew-- Do you know how unsanitary that--” then looks up, mouth

agape and eyes going over Richie's bruises "--is?"

Richie, whose brain has just shut down for a moment, drags some words out "You're changing the sheets?"

Eddie shakes his head and turns his attention back to the task at hand.

"Well, someone has to do it, asshole"

"That's sweet of you, spaghetti head"

Eddie, who is still very much focused on the bed sheets, ignores the nickname and says, as casually as he's able "Do you plan on putting on some clothes?"

Realization strikes Richie, suddenly self aware of his own nakedness, "Oh-- Ehm, yes". He shifts from one foot to the other and runs a hand through his wet hair.

"I can leave if you want" Eddie says, radically lower and softer than before, but he doesn't seem too keen on the idea, because he says it as he finishes adjusting the fitted bed sheet, smoothing out the surface right after.

What Richie wants to say is: *Leave? No, I never want you to leave*, but instead, what he actually says is,

"No, no. It's fine, I'll just-- ehmmm, take some clothes and--" he moves around the room, almost tripping over on the way to his suitcase "--and be back in a minute"

A bunch of clothes in one hand and keeping the towel in his place with the other, Richie almost sprints back into the bathroom, letting go of the tension as soon as he closes the door behind him. *That wasn't awkward at all.*

He takes a look at the clothes he picked up, feeling grateful they matched. Considering how little attention he was paying to clothing selection and how much of his senses were focused on the way Eddie was clearly avoiding looking at him, relatively matching clothes were a success.

He reaches for his underwear and realizes it's not there, he didn't pick up any fucking underwear. He considers going out for a pair but finally decides against it, he doesn't feel like proving what a fucking idiot he is (for the fourth time today, probably). Instead, he grabs the jeans he *did* get and slides into them, he does the same with the t-shirt and decides not putting on the short-sleeve shirt. With his right foot he shoves the towel to the corner of the bathroom and heads out.

Eddie is poofing the pillows, but he immediately looks up to Richie when he steps out of the bathroom. He frowns, so Richie does too; it's an automatic response, he's been on autopilot for a while.

"Is that what you wear to bed?"

Richie looks down, double-checking he has not put on a clown costume or something. No, not clown, scratch that. He hasn't anyway; he's just wearing his normal-- street clothes, because his brain wasn't bright enough to get some fucking pyjamas, so he resorts to the only thing he's good at.

"*Oh no*" and pulls his smug smirk so Eddie knows what's coming "To bed I wear nothing, but I didn't want to shock you with my massive d--"

"Oh my god, shut UP!" Eddie says, raising his voice in the process.

Richie's smirk turns into a soft smile, he really truly enjoys winding Eddie up.

"You're a fucking child" he says, holding back a smile (*success*), and pinching the bridge of his nose before saying "It's late and I'm exhausted, I'm going to sleep"

Richie's smile falters slightly but he nods in response. Eddie awkwardly shifts on his feet and signals the door before moving, as if he's considering whether to say something. He turns around once he's reached the door frame, worrying at his lip before saying "I left a list on your nightstand of symptoms that--"

"Geez, Eddie, I'll be fine!" Richie cuts off, but then tones down "Go to

sleep, man, you look worse than me”

“Yeah, right. Just--” he lowers his head, “Check the list, okay?” fingers tapping on the doorframe, “I’ll be in my room if you need anything.”

The briefest pause and then,

“Goodnight, Richie”

“Goodnight, Eddie”

Eddie has a night routine. He also has a morning routine. They’re similar but not quite the same and he’d gladly expand on the differences to anyone who might ask; unfortunately there aren’t many people that do.

His night routine is simple, or at least it is if your Eddie Kaspbrak; if you’re not, it can be a lot to take in. The first thing he does is strip out of his street clothes and slide into his pyjamas. Back in New York, he’d always sleep in them, no matter how hot it got in the summer; Myra would look at him judgmentally if he didn’t. So that’s what he does now, he puts on his long striped pyjamas and carefully folds his clothes, setting them on a chair next to the wardrobe. Next, it’s the bathroom (and this is where things get tricky). From his toiletry bag, he pulls out everything he’s going to need, meticulously displaying it on the sink. He brushes his teeth first, thirty seconds per quadrant, and then rinses his mouth. Next on is flossing, thoroughly cleaning between the teeth before using the mouthwash. Once dental hygiene has been checked out of the list, Eddie puts his toothbrush, floss and mouthwash back into the toiletry bag. Next step is washing his face; he picks up the soap and wets it just so before slowly rubbing it in circles in his face, being especially cautious around the wound on his cheek. He rinses it off, then sprays some toner and lets it set for a minute before applying his night cream (not to be confused with his day cream). He spreads it evenly by massaging in circular motions, starting from the chin and moving upwards (direction is important). Once a week he’ll exfoliate and put on a face mask, but he did that the night before going to Neibolt, so he won’t be doing it for another

couple of days. And with that concludes Eddie's night routine, unless he's dealing with chapped lips (which is not unusual). If that's the case he'll put on a generous amount of lip balm right before going to sleep (he's noticed it makes his lips look fuller the next day, and he doesn't really know what to do with that information). But that's not the case tonight, his lips look perfectly fine, so he gathers the rest of his products and puts them back inside the bag.

Going over his night routine has become particularly difficult after the Bowers incident. He now kept his bathroom door locked to avoid any surprises; not that Bowers could show up again (Richie very successfully killed him), but he felt uneasy all the same, and wouldn't want to jump on any of his friends if they went into his room and caught him off guard. So now, he unlocks the door and walks to the bed. He checks the time on his phone; it's late, and there are just too many missed calls from Myra. He had only talked to her once since he arrived in Derry and it had not been a fun conversation.

He gets under the sheets and turns off the lights. He is so, so tired. He shuts his eyes and lets himself doze off but when he's about to fall asleep, his phone buzzes in the bedside table. The screen reads Myra--she's calling again. Eddie stares at the screen, deciding whether he's going to answer the phone or let it die. His gaze travels from the screen to his wedding ring, and then back to the screen. He ends up not taking the call; instead he sets the phone on silent mode and flips it over.

All of a sudden, the room feels different. He feels engulfed by this darkness, suffocated by it. He lets out a muttered "*Fuck*" and turns the lights back on, runs a hand over his face and stares at the ceiling. He wonders why he feels so anxious suddenly, he wonders why he's not answering Myra's calls, he wonders why he's been away from home for almost a week and hasn't missed it for a bit. He knows the answers to all those questions, of course, but he doesn't dare to speak them. The sole thought of coming back to New York, to Myra, makes him wince. Without intending to, he finds himself imagining other possibilities. None of them, include her. All of them, include someone else. He shakes these thoughts away because these are dangerous thoughts-- not coming back to his wife? He can't just do that, can he? The ceiling looks really interesting all of a sudden, it's painted white

and has some water stains that can make up a shape if you squint your eyes enough and focus really hard on them. Eddie enjoys trying to figure out what they can be (a cloud? a cat? a frying pan?) because it takes his mind off of thinking about things he doesn't want to think about.

He eventually falls asleep, not even his apprehensive nature can keep him up after almost two days of not getting any sleep whatsoever. He has a good four hours of sleep before he wakes up with a jolt after the first nightmare of many to come. The first rays of sunlight are coming in through the window, and that makes him feel weirdly comforted. *It's not real, it's not-- real.* But he doesn't attempt to go back to sleep, he checks the time on his phone; and confirms that it's still pretty early. Myra hasn't called again. He sits up on the bed and stares out the window for a while. *"You're in a real pickle, my friend"* he hears one of Richie's voices say.

I really am, Rich. I really am.

Notes for the Chapter:

I hated half of this chapter for two days straight, I don't hate it so much now, but let me know what you think!

Next on: losers have a movie night!!! I'm still deciding on the movie so I'm open to suggestions. (Sorry that's actually in chapter 4, I got it mixed up in my head cause I can't for the life of me write chronologically)